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METHODS OF INCREASING THE EFFICIENCY OF RURAL SANITATION.¹

By T. J. ROBINSON, Sanitary Demonstrator, United States Public Health Service.

We are to-day dealing with a problem that is confronting every civilized nation on the globe. Realizing the importance of rural sanitation to a country, all right-thinking persons who are interested more in the saving of human lives than in the jingle of coin are trying to determine practical methods through which the eyes of the people as a whole may be opened to an understanding of the need and feasibility of rural sanitation advancement.

Rural sanitation is a difficult and a delicate problem. It is a difficult problem because satisfactory results can be accomplished only through the education and cooperation of the citizens who live out in the byways of the country, some of whom are so ignorant that when one talks sanitation to them they think he is trying to sell them some kind of farming machinery. It is a delicate problem, because, to accomplish the sanitary improvements needed, it is necessary to extract from the pockets and purses of this same class of citizens a few of their hard-earned dollars.

There has never been a time in the history of our country when good common sense was more needed than it is at the present time, and the thinking people of our country are realizing that fact and are making an effort to broaden the scope of common-sense education among our people.

Rural sanitation will continue to be a difficult problem until the people of our rural communities are more thoroughly educated in public-health matters. Though laws may be passed and powers conferred upon the officials doing public-health work, no sanitary improvement is going to be thoroughly effective unless we create an intelligent interest, both in the individual and the public mind. Therefore we are naturally led to the conclusion that the most effective and most direct method of increasing the efficiency of rural sanitation is individual and public education. Then the questions arise: "How is this education to be brought about?" "How and through what channels are we going to educate the public mind to appreciate the importance of sanitation?" Experience has shown that the part-time health officer has failed in this.

There are three channels through which the people in rural communities may be educated to practice consistently the principles of sanitation. The first to be considered is the public school. It is to be regretted that in a large majority of our rural schools sanitation is neither taught nor practiced, but with the proper influence brought

¹ Presented at the Conference of Field Workers of the State Board of Health at Richmond, Va., Dec. 29, 1919-Jan. 3, 1920.

to bear upon the officials of the school, and with the proper execution of the meager sanitary laws that we have, there could be such an improvement made in the teaching of sanitation, both in the schoolroom and on the school grounds, that the fundamental principles of sanitation might thereby be instilled into the youthful mind, there to grow and develop into action as the child grows up to assume the responsibilities of adult citizenship. Sanitary clubs, organized among the larger boys and girls of the country schools, will serve to create an interest in and greatly facilitate the work of rural sanitation, both at the school and at the home. Such clubs should be supplied, through their sanitary demonstrator, with a sufficient amount of public-health literature, furnished either by the State or the United States Public Health Service, and they should have regular monthly meetings at which the sanitary conditions of their immediate community and methods of improving them can be discussed.

The second channel of increasing the efficiency of rural sanitation through education is the careful distribution of public-health literature among the adult citizens of the community. It is true that this method is a slow one, but experience has taught us that it is effective. The results obtained from the distribution of such literature will depend entirely upon the manner in which it is distributed. Therefore good judgment should be exercised, and an effort made to place the literature where it will be most effective. The merchants and other business men, for instance, are receiving much advertising and other literature, most of which goes into the wastebasket without ever being read; whereas the average farmer ordinarily does not receive a great amount of literature, and that which he does receive is usually read by both him and his family. Therefore, among farm households, educational efforts through the distribution of literature may prove especially advantageous.

The third and most important channel of increasing efficiency through education is the work of the "Man on the Job." Upon him and upon the efforts that he puts forth depends the success or failure of the work in his county, not only for the present time, but for some time to come. There is no means through which the public can receive more accurate and more direct information than through the man on the job. If he is a man who is able to talk rural sanitation with the proper degree of enthusiasm and energy and common sense, I will venture that at least 90 per cent of the homes that he visits will realize the need and importance of sanitation, and will carry out his recommendations. This, however, can not be accomplished by making rush visits. It is not the man who visits the largest number of homes in one day or in one week who accomplishes the greatest results; it is the man who goes into a home with a definite idea of improving the conditions of that home and who spends time enough

there in explaining to convince the people that such recommendations as he is making are necessary. Wherever such men go, we will find conditions changed and the sentiment of the people in favor of sanitation. Experience has taught us that where the proper individual appeal has been made, satisfactory results almost always follow.

To fill this position we should have men of character and influence; men who realize the responsibilities of the position they occupy; honest men; men who have as much interest in the results of their work at the end of the month as they have in the pay check they receive; men who realize that the value of their work is not measured by dollars and cents but by the saving of human lives; men who will believe and practice the motto that "Keeping everlastingly at it will win;" men filled with energy and enthusiasm and who have a definite object in view and let that object be the saving of human lives.

The harvest is ripe. The boys coming home from the Army camps have told what sanitation accomplished there. The people are interested; they are earnestly and eagerly waiting and watching for us to come and tell them what to do. There has never been a better time than this to see results. Let us go into this work with the same kind of determination to win that was displayed by our noble boys on Flanders's fields. Every man to his post and we will go "Over the top."

ALL-AMERICA HEALTH CONFERENCE ON VENEREAL DISEASES.

FIRST REGIONAL CONFERENCE TO BE HELD IN WASHINGTON, D. C., DEC. 6-11, 1920.

The All-America Conference on Venereal Diseases, to be held in Washington, D. C., December 6-11, 1920, is the first of a series of regional conferences suggested by the International Health Conference held at Cannes under the auspices of the League of Red Cross Societies. It is fitting that the first conference concern itself with the control of venereal diseases, for it is now generally recognized that these diseases constitute a large and important factor in the impairment of public health.

It is the purpose of the administrative committee of the conference to bring together recognized authorities in their respective fields and especially to make possible a comparison and evaluation of the methods now being employed in various parts of the world for the control of venereal diseases. As far as possible the presentation of set papers will be avoided, it being felt that full and free discussion will be far more helpful to those who attend.